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HOW MUCH DO I STUDY THE BIBLE, AND HOW?

RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTION FROM WORKING PASTORS.

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Two ways of considering the Bible.—Their relation.—Topical study illustrated.—Hindrances from lack of time.—An unattained ideal.

In my experience I have had to consider the Bible in two ways: as a book of devotional inspiration, and also as a guide to religious thought and an authority in matters of faith and life. For the latter purpose my effort has been to be as critical, exact and thorough as my time and capacity permit. I find afterwards that the devotional use of the Bible is much widened by such critical study, and that, although it leads to the rejection of portions of Scripture as unfit for purely devotional purposes, on the other hand, it greatly deepens the meaning of the rest. From the fact that my pulpit has the first claim on my time, my study is largely topical. To give an illustration: I have just been interested in tracing through the different documents of the Jewish history the various values of the "Sabbath" and seeking the corresponding values in the prophetic books; to fix, if possible, the stages of its development in the religious life of Israel and Judah. This of course involved me in a review of the evidences for the separation of the documents, and in an individual application of the principles to particular and doubtful cases. These notes and results only enter into my practical ministry as conclusions, the apparatus is left behind.

In the same way I have sought recently to determine the time in the New Testament development when *πίστις* came to mean rather an intellectual analysis of faith than the living trust in a person; and also to bring the conclusions reached to bear on the pastoral epistles, to see if these reflected the same attitude

of mind as is found in, say, Romans, and thus obtain some clue to the Pauline authorship of the pastoral letters.

So far as time goes, I find myself constantly hampered ; and sometimes I fear that committee work, pastoral work and the necessary preparation of sermons will at last almost compel me to depend on the past and my devotional reading for knowledge of God's Word. I should like to have two hours a day, but that is only the distant ideal, and so far as I can see is becoming a more and more distant ideal.